

businesses. I have always believed that allowing people to keep more of their own money and to use it as they see fit is the best way to help our economy grow.

I'm also pleased that this agreement does not include any tax increases as well as unnecessary spending projects that would have little immediate impact on our economy.

I know Americans are concerned about our economic future. Our economy is structurally sound, but it is dealing with short-term disruptions in the housing market and the impact of higher energy prices. These challenges are slowing growth. Yet Americans can also be confident about our long-term outlook. Our economy is strong; it is dynamic; and it is resilient. It has led the world for many decades, and with the right policies in place, including the extension of the tax cuts passed in 2001 and 2003 that have helped our economy, I firmly believe we're going to continue to lead the world.

Because the country needs this boost to the economy now, I urge the House and the Senate to enact this economic growth agreement into law as soon as possible. We have an opportunity to come together and take the swift, decisive action our economy urgently needs.

Secretary Paulson is here to answer any of your questions. At my request, he has taken the lead in negotiations, like I mentioned, and you did a superb job, Mr. Secretary. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:31 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Elsa Morejon

January 24, 2008

The President. A while ago, I had the honor of presenting the National Medal of Freedom to a patriot of Cuba and a lover of liberty, Oscar Biscet. He was not able to receive the award because he's in a Cuban prison for speaking out on behalf of human rights and human dignity. Today his wife, Elsa Morejon, is here. She has taken some time from Cuba to come to the United States to visit her son. She came up to the Oval

Office to see me, and I'm most honored and most grateful.

We have a comfortable life here in America by and large, and it's hard for us to imagine what it would be like for—to live in a society as repressive as the society of Fidel and Raul Castro. This good woman has had to suffer through days and weeks of deprivation and worry because the love of her life is in a Cuban prison simply because of his beliefs. It's my honor to welcome you here.

My call is for the world to help women such as Elsa. My call is for those who believe that the Cuba of today is a hopeful place to recognize the realities. This is a country that has got political prisoners who are languishing in the jails, who are mistreated in the jails. Our message is, is that political prisoners ought to be free, and so should the Cuban people—free to express themselves and free to realize their God-given talents. So I want to welcome you. *Que Dios le bendiga.*

Ms. Morejon. My name is Elsa Morejon. I'm a Cuban woman. I've come here to the United States to visit my son. My husband has spent most of his youth and is now sentenced to 25 more years in jail for defending human rights and for defending civil liberties. He has devoted his life to the cause of defending human rights in Cuba and throughout the world. We do not live in a free country, and I must now return to Cuba.

I want to thank President Bush for inviting me to this meeting today. And I would like to speak to the international community and exhort them to work for the release of all political prisoners, along with my husband, to obtain their immediate and unconditional release from Cuban prisons.

The President. Thank you.

Ms. Morejon. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Fidel Castro Ruz and Vice President Raul Castro Ruz of Cuba. Ms. Morejon spoke in Spanish, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on Congressional Action on Intelligence Reform Legislation

January 24, 2008

Last August, Congress passed the Protect America Act, which updated our foreign intelligence surveillance law to adapt to today's technology and to meet today's threats. This bipartisan legislation has aided our efforts to monitor the communications of terrorists and other foreign intelligence targets.

Unfortunately, Congress set this legislation to expire on February 1st. That is just 8 days from today—yet the threat from Al Qaida will not expire in 8 days.

If Congress does not act quickly, our national security professionals will not be able to count on critical tools they need to protect our Nation, and our ability to respond quickly to new threats and circumstances will be weakened. That means it will become harder to figure out what our enemies are doing to recruit terrorists and infiltrate them into our country.

Last fall, the Senate Intelligence Committee completed its work on a bipartisan bill to modernize our foreign intelligence surveillance law. I commend Senators Rockefeller and Bond, the committee's chairman and vice chairman, for leading the effort to complete work on this bill.

The Senate Intelligence Committee's bill contains many provisions that our intelligence officials say they need to protect our country. The bill would maintain the vital flow of intelligence on terrorist threats. It would protect the freedoms of Americans while making sure we do not extend those same protections to terrorists overseas. And it would provide liability protection to companies now facing billion-dollar lawsuits only because they are believed to have assisted in efforts to defend our Nation following the 9/11 attacks.

This bill still needs some changes, but I am optimistic that with good will on both sides, we can make those changes quickly. So I ask congressional leaders to follow the course set by their colleagues on the Senate Intelligence Committee, bring this legislation to a prompt vote in both Houses, and send me a bill that I can sign before the Protect America Act expires on February 1st.

Congress's action—or lack of action—on this important issue will directly affect our ability to keep Americans safe.

Remarks to the “Congress of Tomorrow” Luncheon in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia

January 25, 2008

Thank you all. Thank you. I want to thank Tom; he read it just like I wrote it. [*Laughter*] Thanks for your warm welcome. I'm glad to be with you. I'm looking forward to spending some of the afternoon with you, and then I've got to get back to write the State of the Union he was talking about.

Two issues I'm going to talk about in the State of the Union require our immediate attention, and that's an economic growth package that will keep this economy of ours healthy and legislation making sure our professionals—our intelligence professionals have the tools they need to protect the United States of America.

I am confident in the long-term strength of our Nation's economy. I believe that the fundamentals are sound. I know the entrepreneurial spirit is high. We have a flexible, we have a resilient, and we have a dynamic economy. But there are some uncertainties. And after a lot of thought, I called on the Congress, and your leaders responded to enact a growth package so we can reduce the risk of an economic downturn this year.

Speaker Pelosi and Leader Boehner have demonstrated strong leadership. They reached an agreement on a proposal that will have a positive impact on our economy. Congress should move it quickly. And I understand the desire to add provisions from both the right and the left. I strongly believe it would be a mistake to delay or derail this bill.

This package is big enough to affect the economy in positive ways. It will provide immediate help, and it's temporary. The entire package is tax relief. There are no tax increases, no unnecessary spending or regulatory projects, income tax cuts for a lot of people, as well as bonus depreciation for small—for our businesses and small business expensing. It's a sound package. It makes a